Legal
Services
Society

British Columbia
www.lss.bc.ca

# News Release

*October 11, 2005*

## Legal aid financial eligibility levels relaxed

*Vancouver, BC* — Effective Wednesday, October 12, more low-income people in BC may qualify for a legal aid lawyer to represent them.

The Legal Services Society (LSS) is modestly improving financial eligibility guidelines for legal representation services by basing its net household income limits on the Market Basket Measure. Previously, the limits were a blend of MBM and Low Income Cut Offs (LICO). They were last raised in February 2005.

"We believe the Market Basket Measure is the best available indicator of a person's need for assistance," said Executive Director Mark Benton.

Anyone whose net household income and assets fall below set limits is financially eligible for a referral to a lawyer, as long as their problem is covered by LSS rules. Under the new guidelines, for example, an applicant from a household of four with a net monthly income of $2,967 or less (after allowable deductions) could qualify for a legal aid lawyer.

The society anticipates its current budget will cover any cost increases resulting from this improvement.

"Our experience since last February has been that this type of change results in fewer Rowbotham applications, so we expect to see cost reductions in that area," said Benton.

(Anyone charged with a serious criminal offence who has been denied a referral to a legal aid lawyer can apply to a judge to appoint a lawyer for them. Since 2002, LSS has absorbed the costs associated with Rowbotham cases.)

The MBM estimates how much it costs to buy a specific basket of goods and services in different communities across Canada. It was developed by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada in consultation with the provinces and territories and is generally accepted as a cost-based definition of poverty.

LSS developed its financial eligibility limits using the MBM, adjusted for inflation, for BC communities with populations of less than 30,000.

The financial eligibility test for advice services remains unchanged (see www.lss.bc.ca/Legal_aid/finance.htm). Applicants do not have to be financially eligible to receive legal information.

*For further information, see the financial eligibility backgrounder and/or contact:*

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*LSS is an independent, non-profit organization that has provided legal aid to people with low incomes in BC since 1979. Legal aid services include legal representation, advice, and information.*

*Legal representation is available for serious family issues (e.g., involving child apprehension matters or domestic violence) and serious criminal problems. It is also available for some immigration, mental health law, and prison law matters.*

*Legal advice is available through criminal duty counsel in all courts, family duty counsel in provincial courts and some supreme courts, the Brydges Line, and LawLINE.*

*Legal information is available through LawLINE, plain language publications, and Internet services, including the Electronic Law Library, the Family Law in British Columbia, the LSS, and the LawLINK websites.*

*To contact the **LSS Call Centre and LawLINE**, dial: (604) 408-2172 (Lower Mainland) or 1-866-577-2525 (toll free from outside the Lower Mainland).*

*To access the society's websites, go to www.lss.bc.ca.*

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